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Date *30 Sept. '87* _____

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Book may cause deeper look at Woodward

The swirl of controversy surrounding Bob Woodward's new book, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, may in the end precipitate a far more penetrating scrutiny of Woodward himself — his professional ethics, his faults of character, his veracity — than anything revealed about the CIA. And given the growing number of questions arising from the allegations Woodward has made in the book, such scrutiny of the author himself is proper.

Perhaps the most disputationous claim to emerge from *Veil* is Woodward's insistence that he obtained a deathbed interview with former CIA Director William Casey. The dying Casey purportedly nodded "yes" to the question that he had known of the diversion of funds to the Nicaraguan contras from the sale of arms to Iran. The story immediately was rebutted by Casey's widow, who denied that Woodward had gained entry to her husband's room. Whether or not he did, and leaving aside the ethics of stalking a dying man for an interview, medical experts now raise a serious question about the alleged

meeting. They have explained that since Casey was being treated for brain cancer, the frontal lobe of his brain had been removed, causing him to suffer from "aphasia," defined as a loss of the power to use or understand words. Casey's medical condition would have made it medically unfeasible for him to conduct a competent interview, however brief, as Woodward has claimed he did.

Given the seriousness of the claims that Woodward makes in his book about Casey, Reagan, CIA-directed assassination attempts of Lebanese terrorists, undercover Saudi Arabian dealings, etc., it stands to reason that he should offer more than unnamed sources to substantiate his claims. While the controversy may sell more books, it will not enhance Woodward's credibility. The *Washington Post's* editors acted prudently by declining to print the Casey story, because of the sketchy documentation, when it was made available by Woodward several months ago. He would be well advised to remember next time to take a tape recorder. And some extra batteries.